

Hit Amelia Island Trail for after-meal action

JESSICA WATERS
News-Leader

Need to burn off a little bit of that Thanksgiving turkey?

Amelia Island has the perfect answer, with a safe, scenic walking, running and biking trail connecting some of the island's most popular parks.

The Amelia Island Trail provides slightly more than six miles of multi-use trailway, beginning at Peters Point Park near the Ritz-Carlton. Following alongside A1A, the path winds in and out of the heavily wooded treeline and cuts through the Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort before reaching its southern terminus at Amelia Island State Park.

"In 2005, I had a group called The Amelia Island Association, and we were focused on the broader issues of quality of life on the island, and I decided to focus on what we can do to improve the parks," said Phil Scanlan, the founding force behind the Amelia Island Trail and head of the Friends of Amelia Island Trail organization.

In an effort to provide assistance to the island's parks, Scanlan hosted a meeting with the purpose of bringing together the leadership of the various stakeholders — county parks and recreation, city and state officials, Talbot Island representatives and others.

"When I asked them what we could do to help the parks, to a person, they said not to give them anything new because they already had more than they could take care of due to budgetary constraints," Scanlan remembers. "But they all agreed that a trail connecting the various

parks would be a good idea, and it would not be something that they had to find funding to construct or care for."

Scanlan and the members of the Friends group envisioned a trail that not only linked parks on the island, but also connected to the East Coast Greenway, which is planned to stretch from Maine to Key West.

The first step on the road to that goal was securing funding, Scanlan said.

"No one had ever applied for trail grants here, and there is a group in Jacksonville called the Transportation Planning Organization — that is a required group around different regions by the federal government to get regional people together to give out federal transportation money, of which, 1 percent goes to trails," Scanlan said.

Cooperation and involvement between the various organizations and government entities helped secure between \$1.5 and \$2 million in funding for the creation of the Amelia Island Trail, Scanlan said. There were no matching funds required, but the Friends organization was required to accept responsibility for maintenance of the trail — an approximately \$10,000 per year expense.

Although the funding was approved in 2006, the construction began in 2013. Although the originally defined section of the trail is complete, Scanlan said there is much more to accomplish.

"The AIT will connect across the Nassau Sound with the Timucuan Trail, which is being completed in phases on the Talbot Islands. Eventually,

bicyclists and runners will have available over 15 miles of continuous multi-use trail for their use," states the Friends group's webpage.

The next trail section scheduled for completion is the Simmons Road leg of the trail, Scanlan said.

"That trail will run east-west across the island from the shore to Simmons Road, then south to Bailey Road and the ballpark," he said. That section is scheduled for construction in 2017-18, and funding has already been identified.

Eventually, bicyclists and runners will have available over 15 miles of continuous multi-use trail for their use.

"We want to expand — from the north end to Saint Marys and from the south end to Jacksonville" Scanlan said. "We also want to expand to the west, to connect to Yulee and we want to connect to the trails that Terra Point will be incorporating into their development."

Public support and involvement is important to the success of any expansion plans, and is important in maintaining the current trail, he added. Citizens routinely pick up trash and help keep the trail neat and help monitor safety concerns, and projects by citizens such as the addition of benches to a section of the trail, spearheaded by Eagle Scout Chris Matricia, provide additional value to the trail, Scanlan said.

For more information on the Amelia Island Trail and the Friends group, or to join in the efforts to maintain and expand the trail system, visit www.ameliainlandtrail.org.

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CASUAL BIKE TRAILS

Amelia Island Trail (1) Paved, from Peters Point to Amelia Island State Park (6.2 miles) to Talbot Islands (1.2 miles) with a sidewalk spur along Buccaneer Trail from A1A to Amelia Island Parkway (1.2 miles).

Burney Park to Greenway Trail (2) Onroad/dirt/bike lane path from Main Beach to American Beach via Egans Creek Greenway (7.4 miles)

School Trail (3) Sidewalk route from Sadler to Citrona to Atlantic Avenue (2.6 miles.)

Fort Clinch Trail (4) On road and dirt path from the entrance to Fort Clench on Atlantic Avenue to the fort at the North tip of the island. (6.4 miles)

ADVANCED BIKE TRAILS

Ocean View Trail (5) Bike lane/on road/sidewalk trail from Nassau Sound Bridge to Downtown Fernandina Beach via shoreline and Atlantic Avenue (13.7 miles).

Chamber of Commerce to Peters Point Trail (6) Bike lane from Eighth Street along Amelia Island Parkway and A1A to Peters Point (3.1 miles).

Fernandina Beach to St. Mary's GA (7) Future water taxi service for pedestrians and bicyclists (8 miles).

Bike trail map can be downloaded at www.ameliainland.com/bike.

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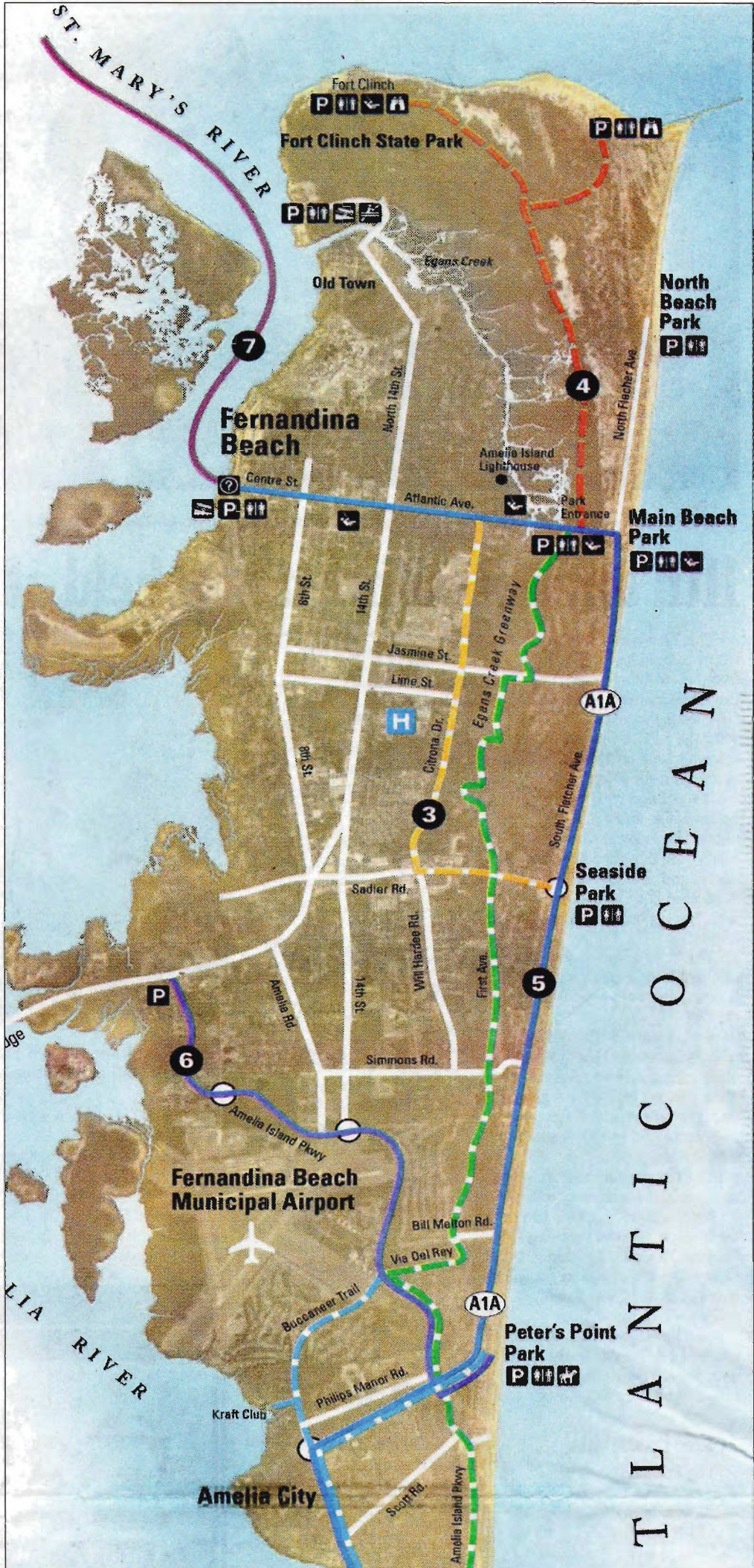
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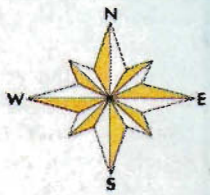


ATLANTIC OCEAN



- Information
- Parking Area
- Restrooms & Water
- Viewing Area
- Boat Launch
- Hospital
- Kayaking
- Horseback Riding
- Playground
- Round-Abouts

Scale 1/2" = 1/2 mile



NASSAU RIVER